WITHOUT COMMENT

THE S2 IS THE SO-CALLED AVENUE OF THE PRESIDENTS BUS BECAUSE its route is the handsome and seductive 16th Street corridor. The S2 travels from downtown Pennsylvania Avenue to Silver Spring, Maryland, a suburban town that borders D.C. at its northern edge.

The ridership on the S2 is black, white, and variously ethnic. Hispanics, West Africans, and Caribbean passengers, as well as other nationals, diversify the sophisticated commuter ambiance. Newspapers, books, and quiet conversations are standard as the S2 speeds its way to Adams Morgan, Mt. Pleasant, the Gold Coast, the end of the line, and back again.

Sixteenth Street—lined with embassies, churches, respectable homes, and majestic trees swaying overhead from Lafayette Park to Silver Spring—this undulating, rolling hill climbs and descends with deceptive grace. At its side, in the middle of a Black gay ghetto called Homo Heights, sits the once glorious, mystical park called Malcom X by Black cultural nationalists, although its official name is Meridian Hill. At dusk it becomes a Black gay cruising ground, while during the day it serves as one of the city's open-air drug markets.

Vandalism and graffiti now mar its classic beauty like brutal knife wounds that have become keloids. The shrubbery has been hacked down in an effort to prevent crimes that still occur. The once green grounds are bald and littered with used condoms and assorted trash. Decay and decline exist here. Gloom and danger are ever present in the piss-stained air, air that is often thick with marijuana smoke and always filled with the hawker's cry of drug dealers. And al-

though children romp and wrestle on these grounds, and soccer players kick the game ball back and forth, the men appear who cannot contain their loneliness till dusk. They are not zombies. Their eyes are luminous with enormous, living hungers, but no one seems to notice except those of their kind. For Black gay men, this park, elegantly appointed with gushing fountains, grand stairways, moonlit plazas, and statues of Dante and Joan of Arc—for Black men seeking the kisses of one another, Malcom X/Meridian Hill Park is now nothing more than a tomb of sorrow.

I remember riding the S2 home one evening, a Sunday, in fact. I had taken the X2 from H Street, N.E. to 14th and H downtown, where I transferred and waited for my S. From the corner of 14th and H you can view the warscape of AIDS and the remnants of casual sex zones reduced to rubble by the aggressive development of downtown. It is interesting to observe new, postmodern office buildings rise on soil where the seed of gay men was once spilled with reckless abandon.

Ten years ago this corner was a sexual crossroads. On either side of 14th Street, from H to I, there once stood thriving porn shops, movie galleries, and nude dance clubs. A block east of 14th, on 13th Street, the raunchy Black gay club, the Brass Rail, was bulging out of its jockstrap. Drag queens ruled, B-boys chased giddy government workers, fast-talking hustlers worked the floor, while sugar daddies panted for attention in the shadows, offering free drinks and money to any friendly trade. Everybody was seeking a sex machine. White folks were sneaking in for their "Black-dick-fix." Sometimes the dose was fatal: Robbery. Murder. The pulsing music always throbbed like an insatiate erection.

A block north of the Brass Rail, Franklin Park was a soft cruise spot primarily because it borders K Street, 14th and 13th Streets offering too much visibility for most. But east of its lower end, bordering I Street, on the 13th Street corner, stood the notorious Curiosity Bookshop, complete with back room, movie booths, garish red lights, gusts of